

MONTHLY REPORT

Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

February 2011



World Health
Organization

occupied Palestinian territory

Summary for February 2011

- 87% of all applications to cross Erez checkpoint were approved in February. The remaining 13% of patients had their applications denied or delayed and, subsequently, missed their hospital appointment.
- A 19-year-old man suffering from kidney problems who had a valid permit to cross Erez checkpoint was detained by the Israeli authorities there.
- Rafah crossing into Egypt was closed until 20 February. As such, the number of patients travelling to Egyptian hospitals was substantially lower than in previous months.

Permit applications for patient referrals through Erez

During February 2011, the Israeli District Liaison Office (DCL) processed 899 patient applications for permits to cross Erez checkpoint to access hospitals in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Israel and Jordan (see Table 1). This compares to 935 processed applications in January 2011.

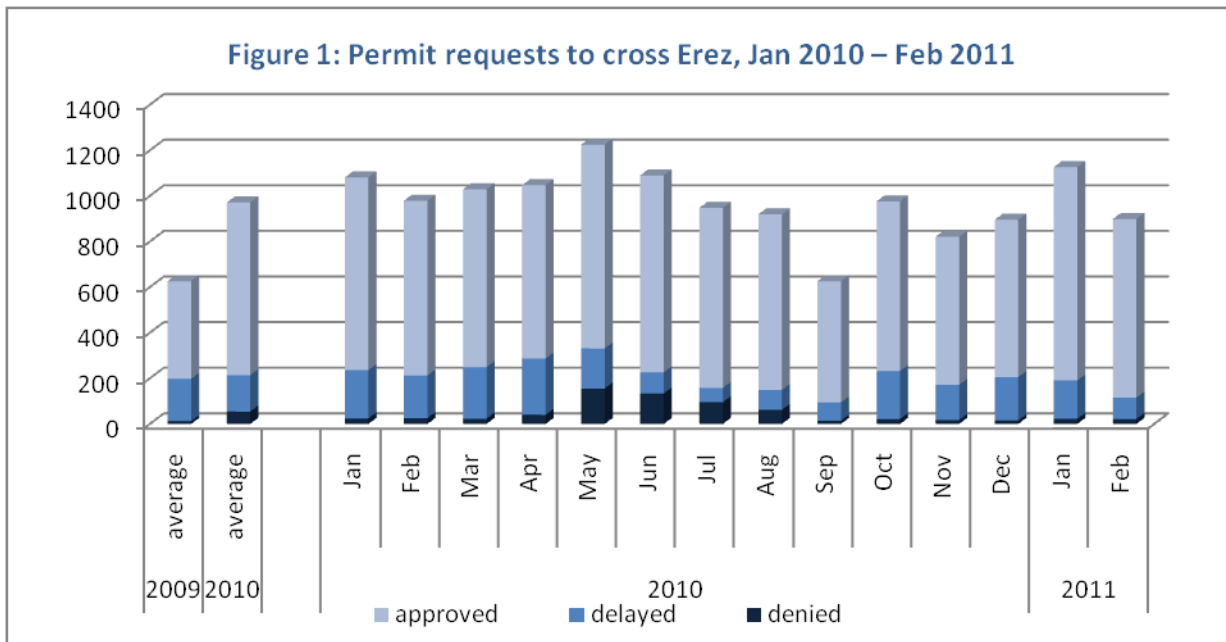
Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed				Did not cross despite approval	
									Out of which called for GSS interrogation			
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0 - 3	80	51	78	49	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
4 - 17	108	73	102	68	0	0	6	5	0	0	0	0
18 - 40	129	107	77	90	15	1	37	16	5	2	0	0
41 - 60	136	110	115	107	4	1	17	2	4	0	0	0
Over 60	58	47	54	44	0	0	4	3	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	511	388	426	358	19	2	66	28	9	2	0	0
Total	899		784		21		94		11		0	

87% of all applications were approved in February 2011 (see Figure 1). This is the highest approval rate since January 2008.

2% of all applications (21 patients) were denied permission to cross Erez checkpoint. Another 11% (94 patients, including 15 children) had their applications delayed. In January 2011 the percentage of delayed patients was substantially higher (18%).

Of the 94 patients whose applications were delayed by the Israeli authorities, 11 (12%) were called for interrogation by the Israeli intelligence services, known as General Security Services (GSS). 4 of these patients did not attend the interrogation, 6 patients were asked to submit a new application and one received approval to exit through Erez crossing.

66% of delayed patients faced delays of more than a week. Delayed patients generally miss their hospital appointments. In most cases they have to seek new appointments and submit new applications for a permit to cross Erez checkpoint. Delays in processing applications can be critical for patients who are waiting for urgent medical treatment. Some may die while waiting for permission to access the medical facility they have been referred to. **Since the beginning of the year 2009, 35 patients have died before being able to access the hospital they had been referred to.**



Destinations and reasons for referral

During February 2011, the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) of the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) approved and issued 1,285 referral documents compared with 1,784 in January. RAD found that 447 patients were able to receive appropriate treatment within the Gaza Strip, in either NGO or private hospitals.

The remaining **838 patients had to leave Gaza** in order to be treated in hospitals in East Jerusalem (33%), Israel (31%), Egypt (22%), the West Bank (10%) and Jordan (3%) (see Figure 2). The total number of cases referred to hospitals outside Gaza was the lowest since February 2010.

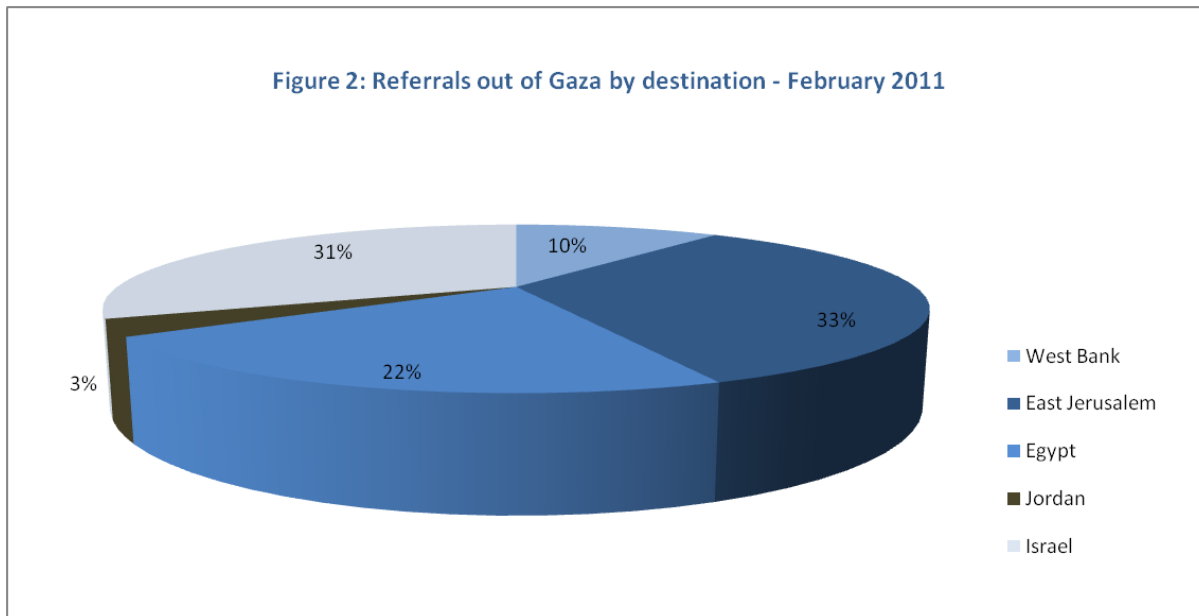
Rafah border crossing was closed for the first 19 days of February. It reopened on 20 February. As a direct result, the share of patients referred to Egypt this month decreased to less than half the rate for January 2011 (46%). While Rafah was closed, the number of patient permit applications to cross through Erez increased¹.

In order to avoid being denied access or being delayed by the Israeli authorities at Erez checkpoint, many patients prefer to be referred to Egypt. This is particularly true for men aged 18-40, who have only a 50% chance of receiving an Israeli-issued permit². Many patients also express fear of being arrested by the Israeli authorities.

¹ For details of the impact of Rafah closure during the first half of February 2011 see: "Update on Rafah Closure: Impact on Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip," http://www.issuu.com/who-opt/docs/update_rad_mid-february_2011

² Figure from an upcoming WHO report.

This fear was substantiated, for example, on 1 March 2011, when **a patient carrying a valid permit, was detained at Erez crossing.** (See “19-year-old patient with valid permit detained at Erez crossing” below.)



The main reasons for referrals in February were: cardiovascular i.e. heart diseases (20%), oncology i.e. cancer (10%), ophthalmology i.e. eye conditions (7%), orthopedics (5%) and neurosurgery (5%)³. These health conditions accounted for 47% of all referrals from Gaza in February; however, together they made up 56% of the total cost of referrals this month, which reached NIS 9.9 million.

Erez and Rafah crossing data for February 2011

According to the Palestinian Liaison Officer at Erez, 734 patients crossed Erez checkpoint during February 2011⁴. 38 of them needed to be transported by ambulance. Because Palestinian ambulances are not permitted to leave Gaza, the patients were transferred from one ambulance to another (back-to-back) at Erez checkpoint. This compares to 709 patients, including 37 via back-to-back ambulances, in January 2011.

Rafah border crossing was closed from 30 January until 19 February (inclusive), due to the political unrest in Egypt. During that time no patients from Gaza were able to access hospitals in Egypt. In the last ten days of February, an estimated 200 patients managed to leave Gaza through Rafah for treatment in Egypt. This included patients who were seeking medical treatment at their own expense and, therefore, traveled without a RAD referral document.

³ These figures include referrals to NGO and private hospitals inside Gaza. For technical reasons it is not currently possible to provide a separate breakdown for patients who have to leave the Gaza Strip.

⁴ The discrepancy between the number of permits approved (784 for February 2011) and the number of patients who crossed this same month (734), is due to the fact that patients who have their permits approved at the end of one month might only cross the following month.

19-year-old patient with valid permit detained at Erez crossing

Mahdy Atef Abu Nasser, a 19-year-old man from Deir Al Balah city, was detained by the Israeli authorities at Erez crossing despite carrying a valid permit.

Mr. Abu Nasser is suffering from kidney problems and passes blood in his urine. He was being treated at Deir Al Balah's Aqsa Hospital in the central Gaza Strip. Since the start of 2011, however, Mr. Abu Nasser's condition had deteriorated and his doctor had decided to refer him to Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem. He scheduled an appointment there for 1 March in order to undergo medical examinations and treatment.

The Israeli authorities approved Mr. Abu Nasser's permit application on 1 March at 1pm. The Palestinian DCO immediately informed him and Mr. Abu Nasser went to Erez accompanied by his mother.

On arrival at Erez checkpoint, Mahdy Atef Abu Nasser was called for interrogation by the Israeli General Security Services and was, subsequently, detained. His mother was asked to return home without being given any reason for her son's detention.

Mr. Abu Nasser's family contacted Al Mezan Center for Human Rights. On 3 March, the family was informed that the Al Mezan lawyer was refused access to the detainee.

Patient companion detained at Erez crossing

The detention of Mr. Abu Nasser comes two weeks after the detention of Mohammed Zorob. On 15 February 2011 Mr. Zorob, who was accompanying his sister Hanan in an intensive care unit ambulance through Erez crossing, was interrogated and detained by the Israeli authorities despite having a valid permit. According to Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, Mr. Zorob had already accompanied his sick sister five times to hospitals in Israel. He had also donated bone marrow to her⁵.

Further information

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⁵ For more details on the case of Mohammed Zorob see WHO "Update on Rafah Closure: Impact on Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip," http://www.issuu.com/who-opt/docs/update_rad_mid-february_2011 and the joint press release by Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, Physicians for Human Rights and ADALAH http://www.mezan.org/en/details.php?id=11524&ddname=torture&id_dept=31&id2=9&p=center

Annex 1: Historic data

District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez (total number and % per decision for given period)					
Period	Total	Approved	Denied	Delayed	
					Out of which called for GSS interrogation ⁶
Jan 2010	1081	845 78.2%	24 2.2%	212 19.6%	85 7.9%
Feb 2010	979	767 78.3%	25 2.6%	187 19.1%	38 3.9%
Mar 2010	1029	780 75.8%	23 2.2%	226 22.0%	30 2.9%
Apr 2010	1047	760 72.6%	40 3.8%	247 23.6%	42 4.0%
May 2010	1225	894 73.0%	155 12.7%	176 14.4%	52 4.2%
Jun 2010	1090	864 79.3%	134 12.3%	92 8.4%	61 5.6%
Jul 2010	947	789 83.3%	95 10.0%	63 6.7%	31 3.3%
Aug 2010	919	770 83.8%	87 9.5%	62 6.7%	20 2.2%
Sep 2010	626	532 85.0%	14 2.2%	80 12.8%	15 22.4%
Oct 2010	976	744 76.2%	21 2.2%	211 21.6%	6 0.6%
Nov 2010	821	650 79.2%	17 2.1%	154 18.8%	13 1.6%
Dec 2010	895	690 77.1%	15 1.7%	190 21.2%	20 2.2%
Jan 2011	935	744 79.6%	22 2.4%	169 18.1%	15 1.6%
Feb 2011	899	784 87.2%	21 2.3%	94 10.5%	11 1.2%
2010	11635	9085 78.1%	650 5.6%	1900 16.3%	413 3.5%
2009	7514	5130 68.3%	149 2.0%	2235 29.7%	636 8.5%

⁶ The percentage rates for patients called for an interrogation with GSS are calculated from the total number of permit applications submitted.

Referrals out of Gaza by geographic location
(total numbers and % per destination for given period)

Period	West Bank	East Jerusalem	Egypt	Jordan	Israel
Jan 2010	125	327	172	11	189
	15.2%	39.7%	20.9%	1.3%	22.9%
Feb 2010	148	327	167	21	168
	17.8%	39.4%	20.1%	2.5%	20.2%
Mar 2010	87	364	204	10	205
	10.0%	41.8%	23.4%	1.1%	23.6%
Apr 2010	97	299	280	7	183
	11.2%	34.5%	32.3%	0.8%	21.1%
May 2010	176	342	209	9	230
	18.2%	35.4%	21.6%	0.9%	23.8%
Jun 2010	125	301	443	10	186
	11.7%	28.3%	41.6%	0.9%	17.5%
Jul 2010	140	253	470	14	203
	13.0%	23.4%	43.5%	1.3%	18.8%
Aug 2010	129	323	388	11	257
	11.6%	29.2%	35.0%	1.0%	23.2%
Sep 2010	99	212	414	8	206
	10.5%	22.6%	44.1%	0.9%	21.9%
Oct 2010	114	285	496	24	189
	10.3%	25.7%	44.8%	2.2%	17.1%
Nov 2010	108	246	429	10	216
	10.7%	24.4%	42.5%	1.0%	21.4%
Dec 2010	124	238	537	15	211
	11.0%	21.2%	47.7%	1.3%	18.8%
Jan 2011	70	294	531	22	246
	6.0%	25.3%	45.7%	1.9%	21.2%
Feb 2011	86	280	185	27	260
	10.3%	33.4%	22.1%	3.2%	31.0%
2010	1472	3517	4209	150	2443
	12.5%	29.8%	35.7%	1.3%	20.7%
2009	1327	2453	3203	364	1158
	15.6%	28.8%	37.7%	4.3%	13.6%